

Femvertising in Delhi: Brand Strategies and Consumer Perceptions of Authenticity and Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

Femvertising is a unique type of advertising that endorses female empowerment messages and gender equality to appeal to the target consumer by promoting a meaningful social message. Interestingly, this concept occupies a contested position between becoming a progressive representation of feminism and commodified feminism. This research investigates how femvertising is incorporated and its impact on persuasiveness. It examines how brands embed femvertising and how consumers in Delhi/NCR perceive the effectiveness and authenticity of each approach. To do so, the study surveys one hundred consumers of beauty brands in Delhi. A mixed-method design combines a five-dimensional stylistic analysis with the consumer survey. The analysis shows that perceived authenticity depends more on the consistency between a campaign's message and its visual choices than on the mere presence of an empowerment message. Purchasing persuasion and perceived authenticity were found to be decoupled; the presence of one does not guarantee the other. While authenticity conciliates advertising effectiveness, it is driven by the personal relevance of the campaign. This research study is meaningful in shedding light on femvertising in a non-Western context, an area not explored enough.

Keywords: Femvertising, Authenticity, Persuasion, Empowerment, Relevance, Correlation

INTRODUCTION

Femvertising is a portmanteau of feminism and advertising. It is an advertising technique that incorporates women's empowerment and feminist ideals to appeal to ideas of gender equality and women's rights (Koç et al., 2024). Most scholars trace the beginning of femvertising to Dove's Real Beauty Campaign, which is widely regarded as the first major example of a brand directly making use of femvertising by challenging the conventional beauty standards (Dan, 2017; Koç et al., 2024). In subsequent years, brands like Barbie and Nike have, in similar ways, incorporated feminism into advertising by promoting gender representation. In various ways, femvertising works as a marketing strategy (Priyadharshini, 2025). Consistently, scholars have communicated how femvertising is a form of advertising that is more of a socially responsible method that relies on purpose-driven branding (Föhl et al., 2025). Here, companies position themselves as not merely sellers of a product but as contributors to improvements in society. In saturated markets like personal care, sportswear, or fashion, it is not easy for

Aug 2026
Vol 10, No 5.

a brand to differentiate itself from others. The strategy behind femvertising incorporates a major competitive element. Companies cannot differentiate themselves solely on functional grounds and on the basis of their product. So, they incorporate femvertising to appeal to the consumer's emotions and values.

When it comes to femvertising, most scholars identify millennials and Generation Z as the primary target audience, who are most strongly influenced by femvertising. These are the groups of individuals who are both highly sensitive to any brand values that are displayed by a company and also expect companies to take stances on issues that require them to be talked about, which, in this case, is feminism. Moreover, this age group of individuals displays a high customer loyalty to brands that align with their own personal values and beliefs about society's structures. For brands whose target audience is young women, femvertising can be a catalyst in improving financial performance as well as brand image by being used as identity marketing. In identity marketing, brands essentially appeal to the consumer's values (Luan, 2023). Here, a brand feels more like a mirror of the consumer's beliefs, making it intensely relatable to the target audience. Dove's long-running Real Beauty campaign precisely uses this, where it is acting as a reflection of the young women who purchase from their brand, immediately increasing customer loyalty and strengthening their brand image.

More than a financial gain, femvertising functions as a broader framework of corporate social responsibility (Sterbenk et al., 2021). By publicly challenging stereotypical viewpoints of women through feminist advertising, brands communicate their ethical commitments not just to the consumer base but also to stakeholders, which are third parties beyond their immediate consumer base. However, scholars have raised concerns about the risks that femvertising can pose to a brand (Lima & Casais, 2021). Consumers are increasingly becoming skeptical of brand campaigns that incorporate femvertising because authenticity is not something that can be promised any longer. Consumers have been demanding evidence that confirms that the brand truly believes in the social cause they promote and is consistent in their internal environment, work culture, behaviour, and practices. Things like workplace policies and the leadership representation of women all come into account when considering authenticity. Brands that increasingly promote female empowerment yet also ignore gender inequality in their internal work culture often face backlash because of their hypocritical approach. The work culture environment where the same social cause is not being promoted exposes the brands' intentions and reveals how their message lacks authenticity. In such a case, instead of the brand's image being strengthened, it only weakens and worsens, resulting in reputational damage. Therefore the logic behind femvertising is not possible to be separated from the doubts and questions about the credibility of a campaign. In light of this, this paper seeks to understand femvertising as it relates to brand strategies and consumer perceptions of authenticity and effectiveness in New Delhi.

The next section explores research on femvertising, focusing on its definition, how brands incorporate it as a marketing strategy, and consumers' perceptions of it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars significantly differ in their viewpoints on femvertising and its impact. Åkestam et al. (2017) and Sterbenk et al. (2021) define this type of advertising as an explicit approach used to challenge stereotypical portrayals of women, which encourages society to move toward a positive change and reduction of gender inequality (Ho et al., 2026). Femvertising is a notable form of marketing because it is, more precisely, an opposition to the same stereotypes that the advertising industry itself created in previous years. Rather than simply submitting to social stereotypes set by the industry, femvertising encourages others to move away from such ideas and promotes agency (Gwynne & Chay, 2022).

2.1 Femvertising and feminist discourse

Some critics have approached femvertising from a more critical lens. Scholars have discussed the concept of commodity feminism, proposed by Robert Goldman in 1991, arguing that femvertising is exploiting the discourse of women and societal inequalities. Femvertising is essentially allowing brands to exploit the feminist discourse and inequalities in societies for their own profitability and commercial ends. In femvertising, brands are simply using the message of gender equality as a superficial means to have a marketable identity for the general public.

Within such a framework, critics argue that femvertising is simply positioning a product as the feminist option instead of fighting against a problem (Goldman et al., 1991; Buckley et al., 2024). An example is the #LikeAGirl campaign by Always, which was widely criticized for de-politicizing the common feminine struggle of today's women that it claims to support by simply reframing this very gendered viewpoint as a marketing identity.

Other works on femvertising discuss 'femwashing,' 'corporate feminism,' and 'faux-feminism,' which are similar terms for describing situations in which brands lack sincerity and authenticity in incorporating the message to cause meaningful change (Ho et al., 2026). Ever since 2018, campaigns have increasingly adopted commodity feminism, where they are promoting "love your body" messaging while still submitting to a gender stereotype (Martínez-Aguirre et al., 2025). The contrasting definitions of femvertising, therefore, not only serve as mere differing viewpoints but are the very basis of how consumers will respond to different campaigns that incorporate femvertising. While one definition proposes that femvertising is progressive, the other portrays it as a commercialized strategic method in which feminist discourse is being exploited for the brand's commercial success.

2.2 Advertising and consumer behavior

To understand when femvertising would work, we need to explore how advertising, in its entirety, shapes consumer attitudes and behaviors. Dirwan and Latief (2023) identified two foundational concepts that contribute to the influential ability of advertising campaigns: the Theory of Planned Behavior, which reveals that behavioral intentions are shaped by attitudes, social norms, and perceived control; and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which distinguishes between central (argument-based) and peripheral (emotion-based) routes to persuasion (Dirwan & Latief, 2023).

For femvertising, it primarily functions through the peripheral route, relying on the emotional resonance that the target audience will be reached through a femvertising campaign (Dirwan & Latief, 2023). Emotional factors are the catalyst in making a change in the consumer's viewpoint. Dirwan and Latief have found that, when it comes to advertising, the main thing with emotions is that any positive emotion will essentially always lead to improved purchase intentions of the consumers and shape post-purchase experiences (Dirwan & Latief, 2023). On the other hand, Lerner et al. (2015) specifically discuss how not merely general positive emotions, but rather specific emotions, can lead to the production of decision-making in distinct ways and how it can uniquely influence judgment. Any femvertising campaign that is intending to evoke feelings of pride or solidarity is essentially using what scholars have termed emotional branding, which is a connection between the consumer and the brand that operates at an effective rather than purely rational level.

2.3 Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (2004) has shown that consumers are more likely to purchase a product whose values and messaging align more with their self-concept, values, and beliefs. When it comes to femvertising, this means that women who are strongly in favor of gender equality will be greatly persuaded by advertisements that use feminist concepts, as it deeply resonates with their self-values and beliefs as feminists. They will more likely develop positive attitudes towards the campaign that reflect their values (Maldonado, 2026). A study conducted on Gen Z women found that femvertising campaigns were indeed evaluated positively when they were perceived as highly congruent with the viewer's self-concept (Buckley et al., 2024). For example, one participant described the Nike "The Girl" advertisement campaign as really relatable, despite knowledge of skepticism around Nike's workplace practices. It suggests that when it comes to emotional appeal, a brand campaign's self-identification can often override any critical rational evaluation of the brand's sincerity, as the social identity theory suggests.

Dirwan and Latief discuss emotional contagion, the process through which consumers absorb and internalize the emotional tone of advertising. When advertising triggers an identification and uses a positive emotion, it generates an intense amount of word-of-mouth behavior, which strengthens customer loyalty (Dirwan & Latief, 2023). If a campaign is too generic or is not in congruence with the target consumer's identity, it may feel like a very superficial campaign idea, which is very disconnected from

reality. It will, instead of positive responses, tend to produce negative responses towards the brand, potentially hampering the brand's image in the short term and long term (Ho et al., 2026).

All together, the literature discusses femvertising and its intersection with social progress and strategic promotion. This literature is, however, concentrated in Western contexts. Research about femvertising in the Indian market and the impact of cultural context on it remains scarce. Given this gap, this research aims to explore the impact of femvertising in the Indian market, focusing on the question: “How are brands incorporating femvertising into their advertising in the Indian context, and how do consumers in Delhi/NCR perceive the authenticity and effectiveness of these campaigns?”

METHODOLOGY

To investigate this question, the study relied on primary and secondary data. For the primary research, a survey of 100 individuals was conducted through Google Forms, investigating the impact of advertisement messages on consumer perception. For secondary research, a literature review was conducted to create a five-dimensional measuring mechanism to determine the extent of femvertising.

3.1 Research Design

This research uses a mixed-method design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data to thoroughly examine the research question. The quantitative data provides insight on the extent consumers are impacted by femvertising. Qualitative data illustrates how this impact is established by analysing the key elements of the femvertising campaigns. This study examines how varying levels of femvertising in Indian beauty advertising influence the persuasiveness of these advertisements as perceived by Delhi based consumers. The rationale behind incorporating a mixed method is that the author can examine both sides of the research question.

The qualitative strand of the study consists of a structured thematic and visual analysis of three selected television advertisements, each representing a different extent of femvertising incorporation classified as low, medium, and high. This analysis examines the specific visual, tonal, narrative, and structural strategies employed in each campaign and situates these within existing femvertising theory. The quantitative strand consists of a structured consumer survey administered to Delhi-based respondents, who watch all three advertisements within the survey instrument and then respond to a standardised set of questions measuring their perceptions of authenticity, brand attitude shift, and persuasiveness for each campaign. Using both methods allows for triangulation of findings. Where the qualitative analysis identifies specific campaign elements as markers of high or low femvertising extent, the survey data can indicate whether these same elements produce differential responses in consumers.

3.2 Selection of Case Studies

Three television advertising campaigns from Indian personal care and beauty industry brands were selected as case studies to be examined for the research question. The campaigns are:

1. Lakmé India - Effortlessly, Fashionably, Unapologetically ME (2023), representing a low extent of femvertising incorporation
2. L'Oréal Paris India - Worth It featuring Alia Bhatt, representing a medium extent
3. Dove India - #StopTheBeautyTest (2021), representing high extent.

The method of selection was specifically designed to eliminate any extraneous variables like brand awareness and reputation that might have hampered the accuracy of the results. All three brands are beauty and personal care brands which generally target the mass market. They are internationally recognized and have comparable levels of consumer awareness among urban Indian women residing in Delhi. Moreover, they target almost the same demographic of young modern and Indian women and have all indulged in feminist-focused advertisements in the past. Since all of these variables have been kept constant, it means that the primary independent variable of this investigation can be reliably considered to be the extent of femvertising incorporation in the advertisements.

Each of these campaigns has been classified into low, medium, or high extent of advertising based on an analytical framework which was drawn from the literature review, specifically from the work of Åkestam, Rosengren and Dahlen (2017) and Drake (2017). The five elements that are being considered when evaluating the extent of femvertising in these advertisements are:

On a scale of 1 to 5....

1. How central is the feminist message to the core narrative of the advertisement?
2. To what extent is the product not central to the message
3. How specific is the social issue which is addressed?
4. To what extent is the representation of women relatable (real, diverse instead of models)?
5. To what extent is there a call to action beyond just the product itself?

A campaign that scores low across most or all of these dimensions is classified as low extent, and vice versa: one that scores high across most of the dimensions is classified as high extent. A campaign that scores high in some questions and low in others, coming to an average of a moderate value, is classified as medium extent.

3.3 Data Collection

Aug 2026

Vol 10, No 5.

3.3.1 Qualitative Data Collection: Textual and Visual Analysis

The qualitative data for this investigation will be acquired by doing a thematic analysis of the three advertisements that have been chosen. Rather than solely relying on secondary data, the author will also be looking at a certain primary interpretation of these advertisements and their features. Because of this, the author can guarantee a more specific interpretation rather than generalized descriptions provided by secondary research. Particular features include visual elements, structure and tone, effectiveness in targeting the audience, product integration, and authenticity. Each advertisement is carefully observed with respect to these dimensions, and the findings are then synthesized into an overall thematic interpretation. The three interpretations of the three campaigns are compared to produce a comparative report of how the extent of femvertising differs across them.

3.3.2 Quantitative Data Collection: Consumer Survey

Quantitative data was collected through a structured survey, which was distributed via Google Forms. The survey was collected from Delhi-based consumers who were of all ages and backgrounds. The survey was divided into a total of 5 sections.

The first section consisted of demographic-related questions, which were only to identify the type of consumers responding to the survey.

1. The second, third, and fourth sections corresponded to questions about Lakmé, L'Oréal Paris, and Dove, respectively. In each of these sections, the same identical set of 9 questions was presented. At the top, the advertisement video was inserted so that participants can respond accordingly. Respondents viewed each of the advertisements before responding to any of the questions in these sections.
2. Section 5 was a comparative section where there were specific questions designed to identify the effectiveness of each of these advertisements through a comparative lens. Questions were designed to determine which advertisements were perceived as most authentic, persuasive, and socially meaningful overall.

Furthermore, this research will be looking at not just closed-ended but also open-ended questions among the survey itself.

3.4 Limitations

When looking at the findings of this research, there are several limitations that should be taken into consideration. Even though the sample of the survey was appropriately sized at 100 responses, the respondents were recruited using convenience sampling. This skewed the sample toward individuals who were working professionals or students from Noida and South Delhi. This limits the extent to which the findings are generalizable, as the results may be more representative of one type of demographic than the other.

The sequence in which the three advertisements were presented was Lakmé first, followed by L'Oréal, and Dove, but this was not counterbalanced across respondents. Therefore, the order and femvertising extent were fully confounded. Since Dove was viewed by the consumers after two relatively lower-extent advertisements, it means we cannot be certain whether Dove's scoring across the questions comes purely from their femvertising strategy, its positioning as the final advertisement, or a mixture of both.

Each advertisement has their own unique features which differentiate it. Femvertising extent alone is not the only difference among these advertisements. There are multiple differences, such as the visual format, the presence of a celebrity, cultural specificity, the length, and the setting of the narrative. Dove has an advertisement based in a very domestic and relatable setting which the other two advertisements do not replicate. As discussed in section 5.3, it could be a possibility that Dove's advantage in authenticity can be due to its cultural specificity rather than its empowerment message alone. Some confounding variables were not fully controlled across the advertisements. Therefore, observed gradients in authenticity and persuasiveness may not be driven by advertising extent alone and may represent the overall holistic craftsmanship of the advertisement.

The Brand-Legacy effect may have amplified positive opinions by adding extra credibility and authenticity. Dove has a strong pre-existing reputation for its real beauty campaign. As such, respondents may have considered its reputation as part of the real beauty campaign instead of judging the advertisement in isolation. This halo effect may have driven respondents to be biased in viewing Dove's campaign more positively.

3.5 Procedural Steps

The researcher recruited respondents for the survey by distributing the survey link through their personal and professional network via messaging and emails. Therefore, this research made use of convenience sampling to acquire its respondents from the Delhi and NCR region. It was made sure that there was a screening criterion where only individuals who met the geographical requirement of being from Delhi or NCR region had filled the form, and that no external individuals had been a part of this research. Additionally, the end result of the gender distribution came out to incidentally yield an equal split of 50 males and females. This was not the result of any deliberate attempt at quota sampling, but was instead an unintended outcome achieved during the survey process.

The three advertisements were classified as low, moderate, and high femvertising extent before the survey data collection began. The researcher rated each advertisement on the five-dimensional framework independently. Later, Mrs. Aparna Bajpai, an experienced business management educator, reviewed these ratings and confirmed that they were accurate enough to be taken up for this research paper. She did not provide independent scores of his own and only reviewed the scores already provided. This external review adds a layer of credibility to the initial ratings provided. However, it still leaves a possibility of an unconscious bias or interpretive blind spot that may have influenced the scoring. There was no second scorer for this framework, and the researcher's scores were not corrected, changed, or reviewed through comparison with a second scoring, but only through review of the initial scores.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Prior to beginning the survey, respondents were given an introductory statement explaining the purpose of the study. This statement included information about the nature of the task they had to take up in the survey and the amount of time it will require them to complete the survey. Additionally, participants were also informed of the fact that their responses will be recorded anonymously (Gmail IDs not recorded). They were informed these responses will only be used for the purpose of this research. To ensure that respondents felt comfortable attempting the survey and there was no distress, we also informed them that there is no such definition of a right or wrong answer and that they can honestly respond with whatever they feel is correct in their opinion. For all participants who were 16 or older, no consent or confirmation was required before participating. For those who were under 16, the survey link and access were sent to the parents directly, and the under-16 participants completed it only when the parents had confirmed that they felt comfortable allowing the child to take part in this survey.

This was a completely anonymous survey, where no name, contact details, or other uniquely identifiable information was collected at any point. The responses which were saved securely on Google Forms were only accessible to the researcher. Additionally, these responses were reported in an aggregated format. There was no individual response which was discussed to a serious extent and the disruption of the confidentiality was avoided at all costs.

The survey involved only three ads and answering attitudinal questions for each of them. It was made sure that none of the questions asked were about a sensitive topic or required any disclosure of private information. Participants did not have an obligation to complete the survey, and they did not face any negative consequences for not participating. Therefore, there was no physical, financial, or psychological burden exerted on the participants

FINDINGS

This section presents and elaborates on the research survey findings as primary data. A hundred respondents in Delhi/NCR answered 41 questions examining their perception of 3 advertising campaigns. The table below shows a breakdown of the extent to which the brands incorporated femvertising in their campaigns:

Dimension	Lakmé	L'Oréal Paris	Dove India
Centrality of feminist message	2	3	5
Product de-centring	1	3	5
Specificity of social issue	1	2	5
Relatable/real representation	1	2	4
Call to action beyond purchase	1	1	3
Total (out of 25)	6	11	22
Extent	Low	Medium	High

Table 1 Scores and Classification of Advertisements (Lakmé, L'Oréal Paris, Dove India)

4.1 Respondent Demographics

The 100 survey responses were an equal representation of 50 males and 50 females (50% each). This representation pulled a large bracket of young individuals with 76% between 16 and 35 years old. More than half of the respondents (59%) were 'working professionals,' followed by 19% 'school students' and the rest, homemakers, or undergraduate or graduate students. With all respondents based in Delhi/NCR, most of them reside in either South Delhi (16%) or Noida (32%).

4.2 Purchasing Behaviour and Brand Discovery

Frequency of purchasing varied among participants, with 'every few months' being the most common response (39%) and weekly being the least common (6%). 'Instagram/Youtube' was the most common channel to discover brands. 'Word of mouth recommendations,' 'online reviews,' 'articles,' and 'TV advertisements' also occupied considerable proportions, lying around similar percentages.

4.3 Prior Brand Familiarity

Brand familiarity stayed consistently high across all three brands, with most participants voting 4 or 5 on the familiarity scale.

- Lakmé: 74% of the respondents had a familiarity of 4 or 5, with very few having a lower score. The mean familiarity score was 3.98.
- L'Oréal Paris: Higher number of participants (88%) rating it 4 or 5. The mean score was 4.38.
- Dove India: 87% of the respondents rated it 4 or 5, and it had an average score of 4.43.

The close levels of familiarity expressed by consumers for all three brands suggest that any perception of the brand's advertisements is unlikely to stem from unfamiliarity and is likely due to the quality and authenticity of the advertisement.

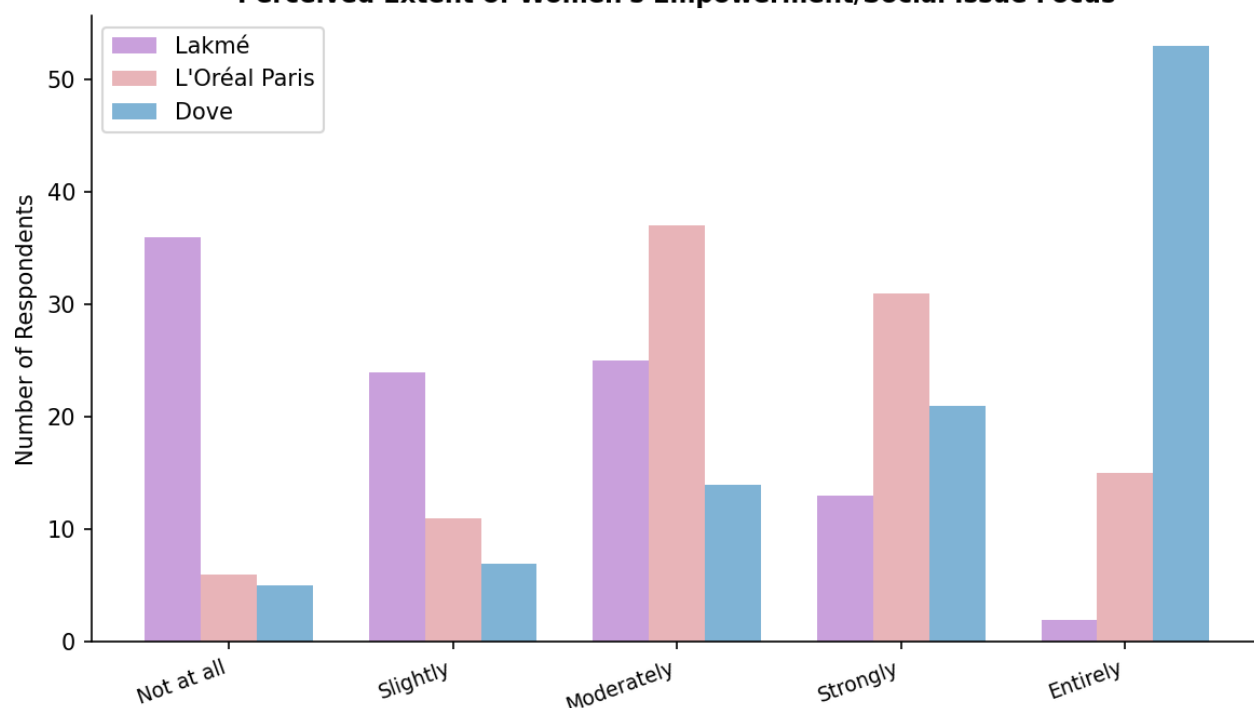
4.4 Perceived Tone of the Advertisements

- Lakmé: Most respondents (59%) voted it to have a 'glamorous and inspirational' tone. 23% of the respondents said 'neutral/no strong impression.'
- L'Oréal Paris: A substantial number of individuals agreed that it was 'empowering and inspiring' (63%), followed by those who thought it's 'glamorous and aspirational' (16%).
- Dove India: 57% of respondents selected 'emotional and moving', and 28% selected 'empowering and inspiring.' Minimal respondents described Dove's tone as 'glamorous' or 'no impression.'

4.5 Focus on Social Issue

Individuals were asked to rate how strongly an advertisement focused on social issues:

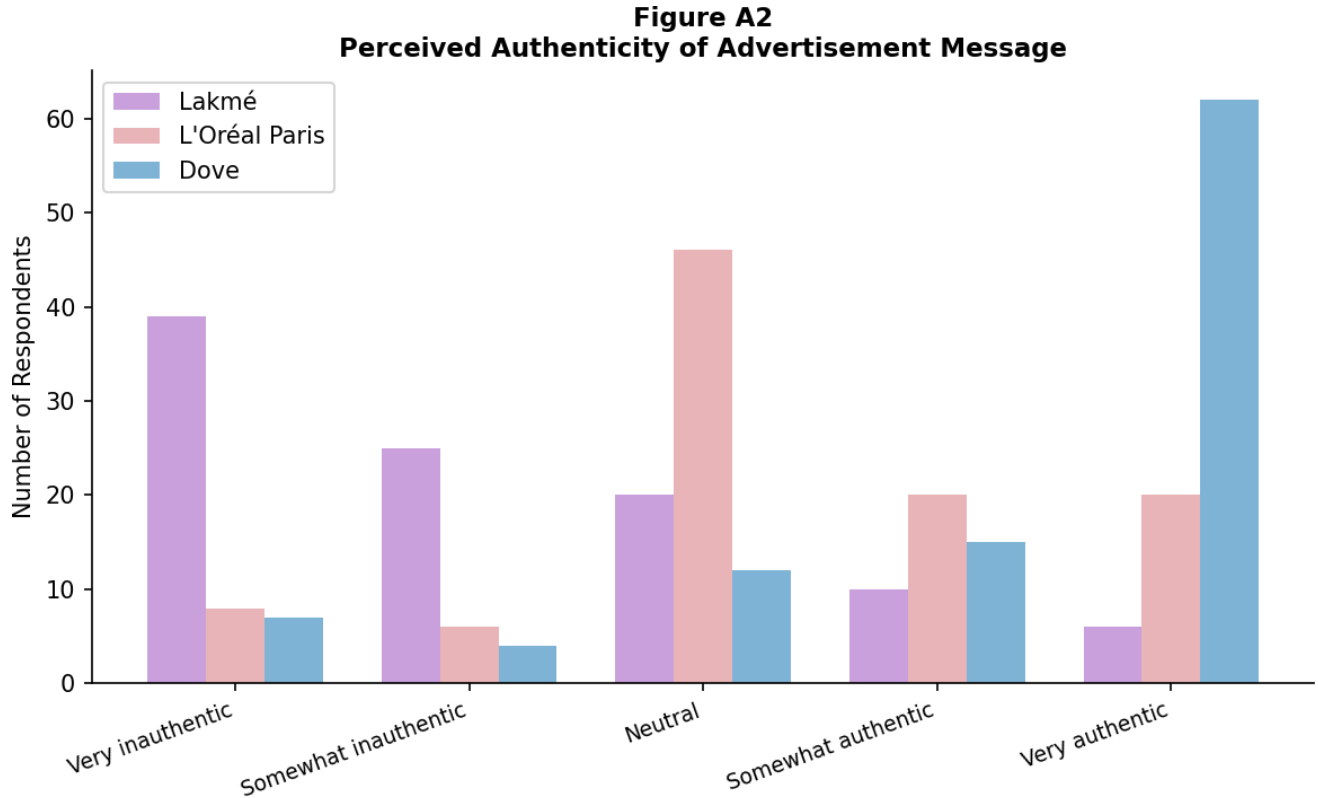
Figure A1
Perceived Extent of Women's Empowerment/Social Issue Focus



- Lakmé: Most respondents said Lakmé had very minimal and negligible amounts of incorporation. 36% selected 'not at all' followed by 25% selecting 'slightly.'
- L'Oréal Paris: Most common response was 'moderately' (37%), followed by 'strongly' (31%). Results showed that the majority believed that L'Oréal carried a moderate amount of empowerment focus.
- Dove India: The option 'entirely' dominated (53%) followed by 'strongly' (21%). The trends showed that Dove entirely focused on empowerment.

This confirmed the study's initial classification of the three advertisements as a low, moderate, and high extent of femvertising, serving as a manipulation check on the researcher's classification.

4.6 Perceived Authenticity



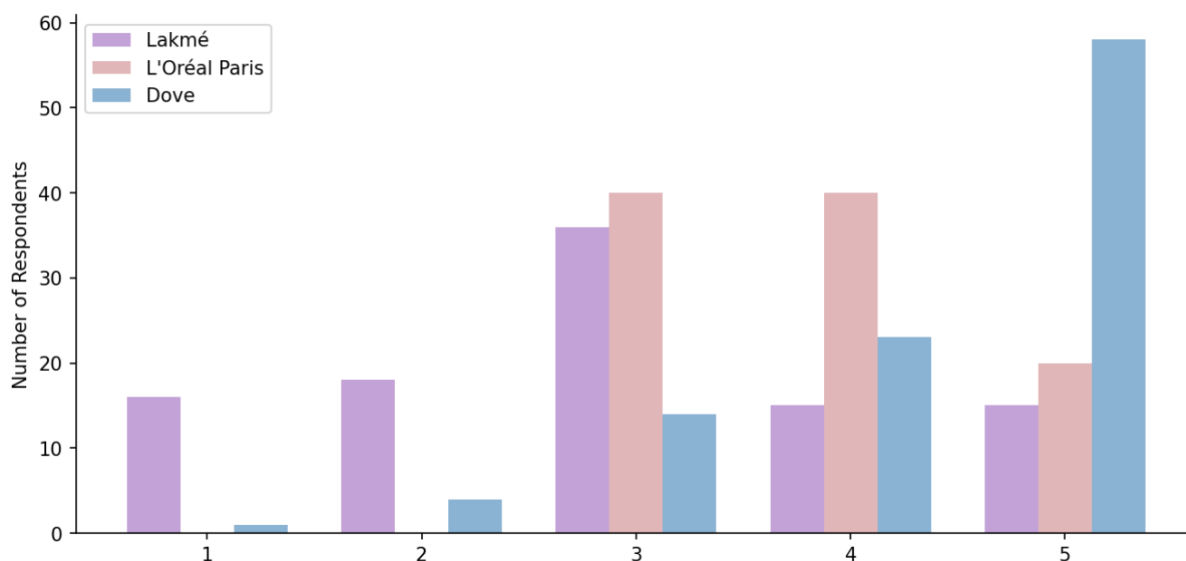
- Lakmé: 39% of people rated it as 'very inauthentic,' 25% of people rated it 'somewhat inauthentic'. Respondents seemed to view it as inauthentic in general.
- L'Oréal Paris: evenly distributed responses, with neutral being the most common response (46%).
- Dove India: Authenticity was marked higher than other advertisements. 62% selected it as 'very authentic'

The shift from the perceived lack of authenticity in Lakmé to the balanced responses for L'Oréal Paris to the significantly positive ratings of Dove India shows the strong difference in the perceived authenticity in advertisements.

4.7 Brand Favourability After Viewing

Respondents were asked to convey the likelihood of them viewing the brand more positively on a 5-point scale. (1- much less positively, 5- much more positively).

Figure E1
Likelihood of Viewing Brand More Positively After Watching



- Lakmé: The mean score was 2.95, with responses concentrated toward the lower end of the scale. The majority of participants chose a number between 1 and 3. (1-16%, 2-18%, 3-36%)
- L'Oréal Paris: The mean score was 3.80, with responses concentrated in the middle of the scale. The majority selected values of 3 and 4. (3-40% 4-40%)
- Dove India: The mean score was 4.33, with responses concentrated toward the higher end of the scale. The majority of respondents selected 5 (58%)

4.8 Persuasiveness and Purchase Consideration

Participants were asked to rate the commercial persuasiveness on a 5-point scale.

- Lakmé: Received a mean score of 2.50, with the responses being concentrated toward the lower end (1-36%, 2-15%, 3-24%).
- L'Oréal Paris: Received a mean score of 3.43. The majority selected values between 3 and 4 on the moderate section of the scale (3-46%, 4-26%).
- Dove India: Received a mean score of 4.06, which was concentrated toward the higher end. Most participants selected 4 or 5 (4-33%, 5-43%)

Respondents who perceived Dove as emotionally authentic still rated it lower on persuasiveness for purchase because emotional resonance with an advertisement doesn't always translate to purchases.

4.9 Personal Relevance of the Empowerment Message

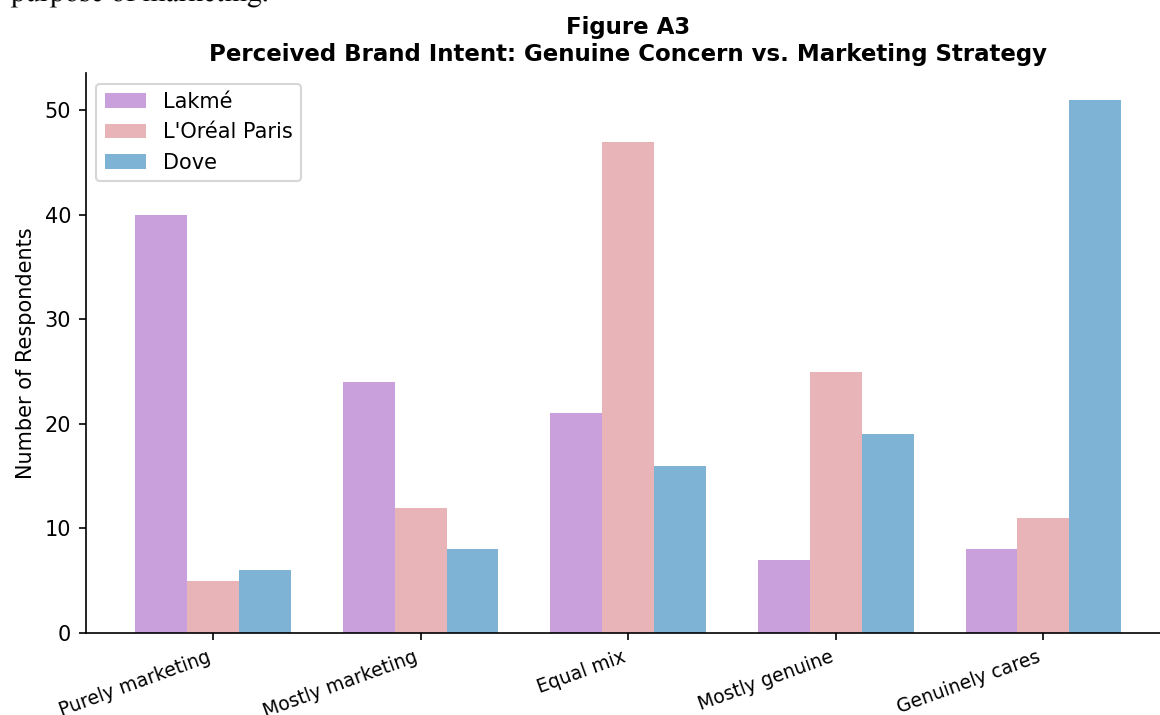
Respondents were asked how much the advertisements resonated with their lives by choosing from 'yes, very relevant,' 'somewhat relevant,' 'not very relevant,' 'not relevant at all.'

- Lakmé: Most respondents chose 'not relevant at all' (36%) or 'not very relevant' (25%).
- L'Oréal Paris: 47% of respondents selected 'somewhat relevant' and 29% selected 'yes very relevant.'
- Dove India: The highest relevance: 55% selected 'yes very relevant' and 36% selected 'somewhat relevant.'

Responses revealed that Dove's advertisement resonated with them because it was a representation of their current lives. More so, respondents tend to appreciate Dove for being real and not overly aspirational with form and messaging.

4.10 Perceived Brand Intent

Next, respondents were asked if the brand genuinely cared about the issue or whether it was purely for the purpose of marketing.



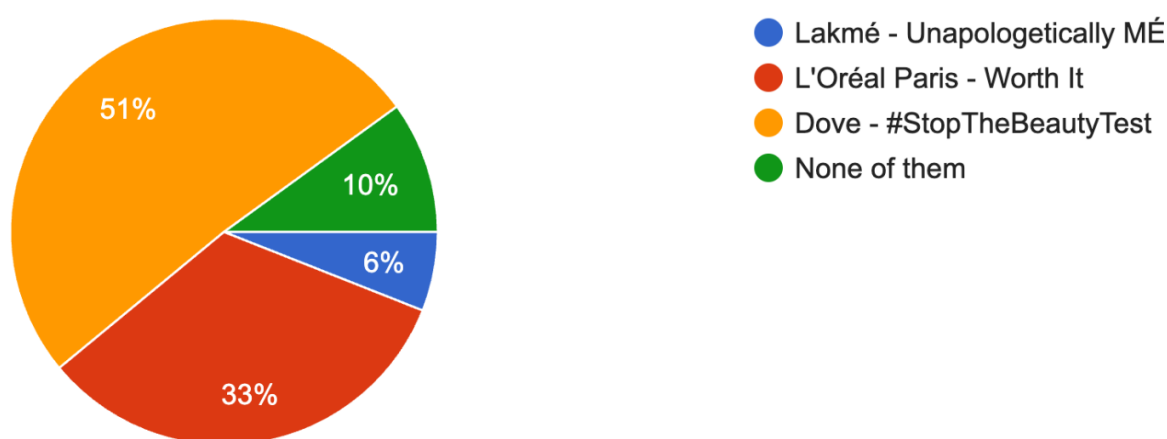
- Lakmé: 40% of respondents selected 'purely a marketing strategy,' and 24% selected 'mostly marketing with little genuine concern.'

- L'Oréal Paris: A balanced perception where most people thought it was an equal mix of both (47%)
- Dove India: 51% selected 'genuinely cares about the issue,' and 19% selected 'mostly genuine with some marketing intent.'

Cross-Advertisement Comparisons

When asked which advertisement felt most authentic, participants selected 'Dove' as most authentic (69%). 'L'Oréal' followed with 17%, and 'Lakmé' with 9%. 'None of them felt authentic' was selected by 5%.

'Which advertisement was most persuasive in making you want to purchase from or support that brand?'



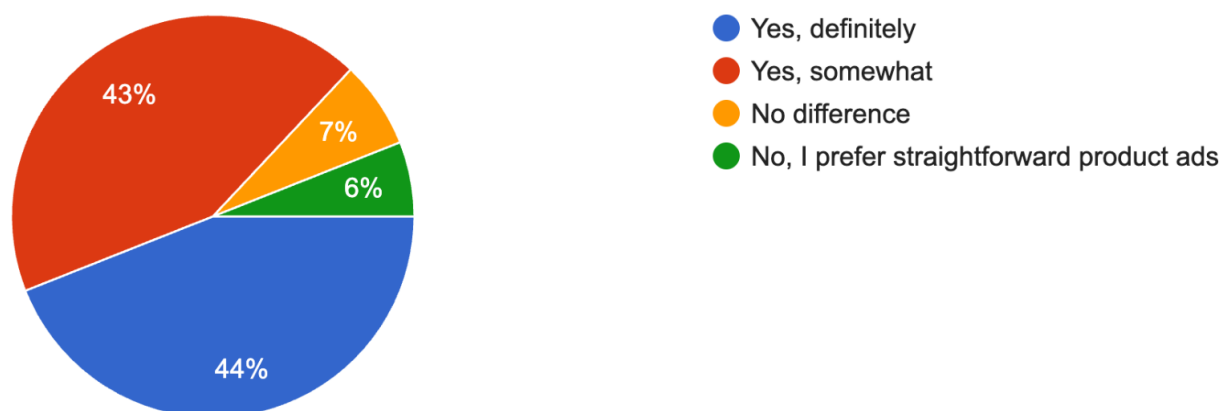
When respondents were asked which brand persuaded them to purchase from or support the brand, 51% selected 'Dove', 33% selected 'L'Oréal', 10% selected 'None of them' and 6% selected 'Lakmé.' The visible increase in percentage for L'Oréal and decrease for Dove is due to L'Oréal's balanced approach. Dove, on the other hand, did not focus much on their products.

Lastly, they were asked to rate which brand focused on a real social issue faced by women most, where 80% selected 'Dove,' followed by 'L'Oréal' at 12% and 'Lakmé' at 5%. 3% selected 'None of them.'

Overall, Dove tended to persuade and impress its consumers more, being perceived as more authentic. At the same time, L'Oréal's balanced approach notably had a great impact in persuading purchases.

4.11 Trust in Social-Issue-Focused Advertising

'Do you think advertisements that focus more on social issues (rather than just the product) make you more likely to trust and buy from a brand?'



Lastly, the survey asked whether advertisements focusing on social issues rather than the product itself made respondents more likely to trust or buy from the brand. 44% respondents answered ‘yes, definitely,’ 43% selected ‘yes, somewhat.’ The rest, indicated ‘no difference’ (7%) or said they ‘prefer straightforward product advertisements’ (6%)

4.13 Spearman’s Correlation

To calculate the Spearman's coefficient, numerical values ranging from 1 to 5 were used for both authenticity and persuasiveness. However, in the actual survey, the question for authenticity was a multiple-choice question with options ‘very authentic’, ‘somewhat authentic’, ‘neutral’, ‘somewhat inauthentic’, and ‘very inauthentic’. These were converted into numerical values while calculating this coefficient: ‘very authentic’ = 5, ‘somewhat authentic’ = 4, ‘neutral’ = 3, ‘somewhat inauthentic’ = 2, ‘very inauthentic’ = 1. The question for persuasiveness was originally asked in numerical rating format, so it was taken as it is.

Advertisement	Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient	Strength of Correlation
Lakmé	0.583	Strong relationship
L'Oréal Paris	0.294	Weak/Moderate relationship
Dove India	0.418	Strong relationship

Table 2 Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient

*the determination of the strength of correlation was done on basis of an interpretation table as given by Jansen (2014)

Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated in order to evaluate the level of strength of association that is there between authenticity and persuasiveness across the three advertisements. All three of the coefficients came out as positive values, confirming that, in all three advertisements, viewing an

advertisement as more authentic would likely translate to viewing it as more persuasive as well. However, the precise strength of this positive relationship seems to vary across the three advertisements.

The advertisement with the strongest correlation value of 0.583 was Lakmé. This very strong correlation is probably due to the low extent approach that Lakmé incorporated. Its advertisement does not incorporate a strong enough empowerment message, so any judgment of authenticity and persuasiveness would have largely been from their product-focused narrative. This advertisement might have simply been judged from the same stimulus in authenticity and persuasiveness, resulting in the strong correlation.

Similar to Lakmé, Dove also produced quite a strong correlation of 0.418. This coefficient indicates that the level of perceived authenticity and persuasiveness still moved in alignment for most respondents. An important observation is the difference in the correlation of Lakmé and Dove. The weaker correlation coefficient that Dove has might be because certain respondents did not feel that its emotional relatableness translated into purchase persuasion. Some respondents brought up concerns about the removal of the product focus and how, as a result, they didn't really find a reason to buy Dove's product.

On the other hand, L'Oréal Paris produced a weak-to-moderate association of 0.294, which indicates there may have been certain deviances in the authenticity and persuasiveness. This lower value is likely due to the fact that the message that L'Oréal presented was much more balanced. It had both a product message and a social message. In other words, somebody may have viewed the celebrity ambassadorship and thought of the message as hollow, but then heard the tagline and been persuaded to buy the product. On the other hand, somebody else may have resonated with the given message while not feeling motivated to purchase the product as much. Because of this dual focus, the correlation of these two factors is relatively lower in value than other advertisements. Overall, the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient confirms the fact that authenticity and persuasiveness can be linked together but are independent of each other at the same time.

ANALYSIS

Survey results show that there is a consistent relationship between the extent of femvertising and the strength of consumer impact across every dimension measured, including brand favorability, personal relevance, persuasiveness, authenticity, and perceived sincerity. This section interprets why the correlation between these two variables is established and examines where it breaks down. It discusses the patterns of stylistic features across these three advertisements from an analytical lens to answer the broader question of how femvertising is functioning as a persuasive strategy in the Indian market.

5.1 The Authenticity-Extent Relationship

The strongest correlation can be seen between perceived authenticity and the empowerment focus: Dove India, which had the highest extent of incorporation of femvertising, got the highest authenticity rating, with 62% calling it 'very authentic.' On the other hand, Lakmé, which has the lowest extent of incorporation of femvertising, got the lowest authenticity with 64% rating it as 'very' or 'somewhat

inauthentic.’ However, simply incorporating a meaningful empowerment message does not directly translate to more credibility. The qualitative responses at the end of each section reveals that consumers are always looking to see the brand's consistency between showing the message and form, not just the presence of the message on its own. (‘This advertisement purely focuses on selling the product and not the real issue in society.’) The stylistic choice adopted by Lakmé of combining a conventionally glamorous visual with an empowerment message has been explicitly regarded by respondents as self-undermining. The respondents repeatedly addressed that advertisements either focus on social issues or promote products and that here it is able to do neither. The stylistic register of the advertisement is aspirational rather than relatable and realistic, going against the claim of empowerment that it makes. As such, the tone is incongruent with the message, suggesting that authenticity in femvertising is not assessed primarily on the presence of a social message but on whether the visual and tonal register of the advertisement matches the substance of the claim being made.

On the other hand, Dove’s campaign considered a much different combination of factors: a grounded narrative setting where arranged marriage was portrayed as the beauty test, an absence of any glamorous staging, and a dialogue within the advertisement that was culturally specific and relevant. The advertisement’s elements worked on the same lines, where the message of resilience towards conventional beauty norms were put together with the realistic and culturally specific narrative presented. Respondents interpreted the advertisement as authentic and relatable rather than just a superficial theme due to the harmony and balance between the narrative and the form.

L’Oréal Paris lies in the centre of the extreme ends of these two advertisements. It received the highest neutral rating for authenticity among the ads (46%), suggesting that respondents viewed it as neither extremely sincere nor cynical. The open-ended questions, which sought feedback on the advertisement, had one consistent recommendation from all respondents: to avoid showing a celebrity. Most respondents were concerned about the fact that the message of ‘accepting my ever-changing body’ does not align with the celebrity casting. Many participants shed light on how it makes the advertisement ‘appear more performative’ and ‘difficult to relate to.’ They have suggested taking up real women from different states in India or showing different body types instead of a celebrity that is known to represent the conventional standards of beauty in India. This feedback is proof that, in an advertisement, the messenger of the message is extremely important in determining the impact on target consumers. A very developed and relatable message was presented, but it was delivered by a well-resourced celebrity, which flattened the authenticity of the advertisement. Even if the underlying message was well received by consumers, this combination can make the consumer's own life experiences feel insignificant, and the advertisement can become less relatable overall.

Overall, this suggests that the extent of femvertising does influence the perceived authenticity. But it can only be established if the empowerment message is being consistently portrayed by all the elements of the advertisement. How effective femvertising is will not be purely determined by the presence of a meaningful message, but also by how this message is incorporated.

5.2 Persuasiveness Versus Authenticity: A Partial Decoupling

Authenticity and persuasiveness did largely move in the same pattern across the three brands, with Dove India having the highest rates and Lakmé having the lowest rates for both. However, the relationship was not perfectly linear: a significant number of participants who viewed Dove as authentic have later gone on to score it considerably lower on the persuasiveness scale. More specifically, in the open-ended questions, participants have discussed how the emotional resonance with Dove's message does not automatically mean that they would be persuaded to purchase the product and have highlighted the fact that Dove hasn't had a strong enough focus on their products for purchasing to be impacted in such a strong manner. For example, comments like the following have been said: 'How are their products related to this?' and 'The advertisement was effective, but it could have included a little more information about Dove's products and how they support the message.' This suggests that the perceived authenticity and purchase intent are not the same psychological response. Therefore, emotional resonance and commercial persuasion have their own effects and need to be isolated. For some, the advertisement is considered to be a form of advocacy and communication for social change, while it is strongly disapproved of as a product and sales-related advertisement. Because of the low focus on the product's relation to the social message, it has left a lot of viewers unable to find a reason to buy or purchase from the brand. It is often assumed that authenticity directly translates to greater purchasing of the product. However, the data acquired from the survey provides proof that this is not always the scenario and that authenticity will majorly drive the message recall and the strength of the brand's image rather than product purchase.

This decoupling of authenticity and purchasing persuasion also justifies why L'Oréal Paris and Dove India had a comparatively lower difference in percentage for 'persuasiveness' (33% and 51%) as compared to 'authenticity' (17% and 69%) ratings. L'Oréal Paris' balanced focus, where it has a visible strand of the visual, focusing on the product or its own branding, has allowed it to preserve the persuasive effect of the advertisement while compromising a little bit on the authenticity. On the other hand, Dove has a near-complete focus on the authenticity and message only, which leaves no space for the product to be linked to the social message being portrayed, completely hampering the persuasive function of the advertisement.

The argument discussed above is also supported by the values of the Spearman coefficients calculated earlier in the paper. The correlation of each of the advertisements is at a strong or weak-to-moderate level, suggesting that even though authenticity and persuasiveness have some effect and influence each other, they are still independent of each other.

5.3 Personal Relevance as a Mediating Factor

The statistics acquired from questions about personal relevance can reveal why extent and authenticity have such a close correlation. Dove was rated 'very relevant' by 55% of the respondents compared to just 12% for Lakmé. The open-ended question revealed that there were repeated references to specific few details, such as the relatability of the family dynamics portrayed in the advertisement. There were

comments about rude relatives, marriage prospects, and remarks from in-laws discussed in the open-ended questions. The Dove India advertisement specifically uses a scenario that the target consumer can identify from their everyday lives and scenarios, making it culturally specific. It is much less likely that a consumer would go ahead and critique an advertisement's intent when it is relatable to their lives to such an extreme extent. Even the individuals who have later gone on to specify that they prefer advertisements with straightforward messaging has rated Dove at a considerably high value of relevance and authenticity, suggesting that the cultural relevance can override any sort of a possibility for skepticism. This specific information revealed a very interesting fact: when looking at this in the Indian context (Delhi), the effectiveness of a femvertising advertisement may be anchored more by not the message itself but how relevant and specific it is to the cultural scenarios in that region (such as recognizable comments which are specific to India). Brands can greatly amplify the impact of their advertisements by anchoring any message of confidence or self-worth to a more specific context relevant to that geographic location.

5.4 The Persistence of Scepticism Toward Brand Intent

Even when femvertising incorporation was to a high extent, there was a persistent conviction of sincerity, where only 51% of the respondents believed that Dove genuinely cared about the issue. The rest were divided fairly between an equal mix of both (16%); mostly genuine with some marketing intent (19%); and those who believed it was more of marketing (mostly marketing, with little genuine concern: 8% and purely a marketing strategy: 6%). The majority of respondents believe that Dove India's campaign felt really authentic. At the same time, many of these later said Dove was doing it partly for financial reasons. Therefore, it can be concluded that authenticity and commercial intent were not exactly viewed as opposites by the respondents. Indian consumers of this survey are capable of appreciating the craftsmanship and authenticity of the advertisement while being aware of the subtle underlying commercial motive that the advertisement carries.

The persistent skepticism can also be explained by Dove's market position as a brand with a strong history in femvertising campaigns. As previously mentioned in the methodology, Dove's Real Beauty campaign has been working for over two decades, so many of the participants may not have evaluated the advertisements provided to them in isolation but as a part of the broader campaign, potentially making their reviews even more positive. Their authenticity ratings may already be anchored to a pre-existing brand reputation built across multiple prior campaigns. This can cause subtle ambiguity. However, the real beauty campaign by Dove is not something individuals in India are extremely aware of. Therefore, only very few individuals out of the 51% who believe it genuinely cares would have done it in a broader sense, rather than for the advertisement provided. It would not undermine the broader finding that incorporation strategy matters but would caution against treating Dove's score as a clean baseline for what 'high extent' femvertising achieves on a first encounter with a less-established brand.

5.5 Stylistic Features as Drivers of Differentiation

The author will be applying the five-dimensional framework to qualitatively evaluate the three advertisements and explain quantitative results.

5.5.1 Visual Language

Lakmé incorporated a lot of saturated colors and conventionally attractive models to represent a luxurious lifestyle. It had a fashion editorial grammar that respondents have considered mostly to be glamorous and aspirational, regardless of whatever is being verbally communicated in the advertisement. This indicates that the visual style was pivotal in determining how the audience perceived the advertisement.

L'Oréal Paris took into account a classy and chic grammar, where there were more subtle and basic colors, bright lighting, and confident delivery, which reinforced the positivity of the message being communicated.

Dove India's visual language was quite contrasting with the other two advertisements. It had a very domestic style with realistic scenarios with real-life people whom others could resonate with. It had muted and awkward moments. All these together allowed it to come off as emotional and moving, which it was rated to be by more than half of the respondents.

5.5.2 Product Integration

Lakmé kept the product as the extreme center of the entire advertisement. Even the audio of the song playing in the background of the advertisement was about describing the '33 shades of lipstick.'

L'Oréal Paris maintained a notable focus on their tagline 'worth it' while also casting the advertisement with a celebrity who has been known to be endorsing the brand for a long time.

Dove India, on the other hand, had removed product focus altogether, so they did not link the message to what their product does. However, their logo was consistently shown throughout the advertisement, and their brand's colors such as blue, white, and golden were used as well.

5.5.3 Target Audience Signals

Lakmé had a casting of conventionally attractive models and a setting where there were affluent interiors in a luxurious home, which implicitly addressed the upper-class urban woman. This particular choice, however, has raised a critique from a lot of respondents. Respondents have brought up how, by pairing this with 'Unapologetically Me,' the brand is indirectly communicating that you can only really be yourself if you're in this certain manner, which gives off the wrong impression and makes the consumers dislike the idea.

L'Oréal Paris' target signals were a little more ambiguous compared to the other two advertisements, as the only really prominent signal that was there was the celebrity figure of Alia Bhatt. The advertisement did not carry any specific social setting. This also justifies why most individuals voted it 'neutral' in authenticity, because the messenger's life is not in alignment with the message that is being implied.

Dove India's advertisement is situated in a domestic household where there is an arranged marriage discussion. It sets it in a position that is widely recognized by a lot of individuals across India. They have specifically incorporated scenarios from different states and various different types of lives of people to appeal to anyone regardless of their gender, geographical location, or lifestyle.

5.5.4 Femvertising markers

Lakmé incorporated a rather abstract message where the empowerment language of 'unapologetically me' was very strong but was very broad in nature and lacked cultural specificity, making it come off as generic.

L'Oréal Paris had a moderately targeted empowerment message of embracing and believing in ourselves. However, the amount of generalization that the claim of self-worth carries made the advertisement come off as slightly ambiguous and also superficial due to its delivery.

Dove India situated the idea of a beauty test in the context of arranged marriages in Indian households, which made its empowerment message specific and relatable. This trend in specificity in the advertisement and the perceived authenticity of the advertisement is one of the strongest, suggesting that one of the best predictors for the perceived authenticity of an advertisement can be the familiarizing markers dimension. This dimension will help brands predict how successful their campaign would be.

5.5.5 Tone and narrative structure

Lakmé's narrative did not have any significant arc: it was simply a sequence of glamorous clips and shorts instead of a developed story. A lot of respondents have even talked about this stylistic choice, where they have described it to feel like 'a fashion show' rather than a meaningful story.

L'Oréal Paris' structure followed a resolution-focused arc. The advertisement began with a recall of all judgemental comments women have to consistently endure listening to frequently (such as 'don't be so aspirational') and then later went on to deliver a motivating message of self-worth and confidence. However, most respondents indicated that it was too fast-paced for it to be a memorable arc. Some narrative development would help improve the quality.

Dove India's narrative structure followed a recognisable domestic setting built around confronting the many underlying struggles of young women in India. Instead of providing a solution, the advertisement simply concluded with a narrator directly confronting the viewer by asking them, 'till when will this ugly search for beauty keep on going?' in Hindi. Respondents describe wanting to see the narrative extended further (a sequel, a future where judgement gets eliminated, a 'school version').

5.5.6 Authenticity indicators

Lakmé used constructed settings and styled models to represent ‘real’ women, which hampered its authenticity. This made the advertisement feel staged and too aspirational.

L'Oréal Paris delivered their message from a celebrity ambassador rather than an ordinary woman, which respondents interpreted as working against the advertisement's very message. The celebrity's life experiences were mostly incongruent with the message itself, denting authenticity.

Dove India cast real women and families from all over India, which respondents received as a strong effort from the brand's end to maintain a sincere attitude toward discussing the topic.

CONCLUSION

By investigating consumers' responses to three advertisements with different levels of femvertising (Lakmé, L'Oréal Paris, and Dove India), this research revealed the effectiveness of femvertising on Indian consumers. The results show the complexity of perception among consumers. Simply endorsing an empowerment message did not translate to a positive consumer response. Consumers observed every detail of the advertisement, looking for hints of the brand's consistency or lack thereof, to determine the authenticity and sincerity of the advertisement.

Lakmé's campaign endorsed glamor and fashionable aesthetics; however, its visual choices and distance from reality undermined its empowerment message. L'Oréal Paris' advertisement balanced product focus and social messages in a meaningful manner. While introducing its message with good intentions, it was hampered because of the distant celebrity whose life was not in congruence with the social issue being described. Dove India succeeded in creating the impression of authentic, sincere communication of its message due to the congruence of all the elements (narrative structure, messengers, and casting). Consistency can amplify the impact an empowerment message carries on to its target consumers, especially in a city like Delhi, where culture appeals to consumers.

Authenticity, persuasion, and trust in the brand motive did not have a strong correlation as expected. Despite Dove being voted as most authentic, Delhi consumers still discussed their doubts about intent in the open ended questions which suggests they were particularly observant of details

Ultimately, one consistently accurate finding from the study would be the fact that in the Indian beauty market in Delhi, femvertising succeeds not based on whether a brand can engage in female empowerment but more in the specificities of the campaign and how consistent the brand is in endorsing the social issue or practice that they are promoting. Rather than general claims, people preferred culturally specific ones. Factors like specificity, a clear link, consistency in visuals, casting, relatable messengers, and balance in product focus contributed to a healthy response from consumers.

Certain suggestions for posterity can include keeping a counterbalanced approach would help eliminate the order effect. Here, for each participant, the order of the ads and the questions would not be constant &

would be a randomized allocation. It would establish whether trends in authenticity and persuasiveness are purely due to the femvertising extent. Future studies should prioritize making sure that the stimuli they take up for research have all external variables under control (length of ad, the visual format, the presence of celebrities, cultural specificity) to eliminate external effects and establish stronger correlation between the femvertising extent and persuasiveness of the advertisement. Two-coder reliability should be used as it would extend the overall credibility of the research. By having another individual independently score each of the advertisements and comparing the two scores, we can eliminate the bias of one researcher's interpretation and come to a more verifiable consensus on the qualitative classification of the three advertisements.

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